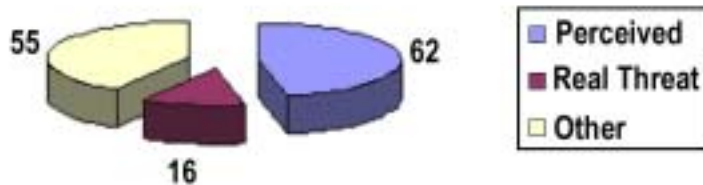


Black bears and public safety: The reality

Reasons for Bear Incidents, 2001



Reasons for Bear Incidents in 2000

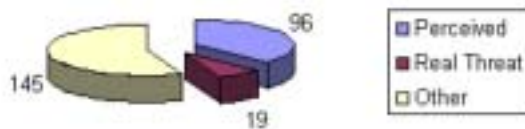


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It was a cool mountain morning, and the homeowner hurried to finish the outside chore of weeding because the heat of mid-day was eminent. No sooner had he rounded the corner of his house with a wheel barrel of weeds, when he nearly ran

By Doug Updike

head on with an adult black bear. He involuntarily screamed, dropped the wheel barrel and ran into the house.

The phone rings in the regional headquarters of the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and a breathless homeowner is on the phone. According to policy, the DFG employee begins to fill out a Wildlife Incident Report Form to collect all the important information about the incident being described by the reporting party. It's very clear that the homeowner believes that the bear has been a serious threat to his safety.

DFG's Public Safety Wildlife categorize public safety incidents into three types. The most severe of these categories is an "attack" by a wildlife species resulting in physical contact, injury or death. These incidents are very rare for black bears, and none occurred in 2000 and there is just one in 2001.

The next most serious category is a "threat," where the presence of the animal is confirmed by a responding person (DFG employee or a law enforcement officer), and the responding person perceives the animal to be an imminent threat to public safety. Imminent threat means there is a likelihood of human injury based on the totality of the circumstances.

Finally, the least severe category is labeled as a "sighting." In these cases, the reporting party believes they are being threatened by the bear, but follow up confirms that no real threat exists. These sightings are perceived

threats that are usually resolved by providing additional information to the reporting party about the natural history and behavior of black bears.

DFG has been keeping track of public safety wildlife incidents since 1999. There are two years (2000 and 2001) to date. The majority of the incidents are related to mountain lions and black bears. In 2000, bears represented 39 percent of the total wildlife incidents reported. In 2001, bears represented only 20 percent of the reported incidents.

Of the total number of bear-related public safety wildlife incidents in 2000, the majority (56 percent) of the incidents were deemed to be concerns over private property damage, or the safety of a pet. Ninety-six (37 percent) of the bear-related incidents were only sightings. Nineteen (7 percent) were deemed real threats, and there were 20 bears killed in those incidents. Of the 20 bears killed, 15 were males and five were females.

Of the total number of bear-related public safety wildlife incidents in 2001, 41 percent were for reasons other than public safety. Sixty-two (47 percent) of the bear related incidents were only sightings. Sixteen (12 percent) were deemed real threats, and there were 25 bears (17 males, four females and four undetermined) killed in those incidents.

The data show that improving the understanding of bears and bear behavior will significantly reduce the perceived threats to public safety. In light of this, DFG has launched a bear awareness campaign focused on providing information to the public statewide and intensifying public information activities in areas where bear/human interactions are highest. Understanding bear behavior will not only reduce human-bear conflicts but relieve the anxiety many residents experience living with black bears. 🐻

Doug Updike is a senior wildlife biologist specializing in bears and wild pigs.



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